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ABSTRACT

After briefly reviewing the National Council of Churches' 1984 policy statement on child day care, this consultant's paper discusses the place of church-based child care in the field of early childhood education. Short overviews of early childhood curricula published and distributed by churches, the special contribution of churches to the field of early childhood education, established training networks within denominations, and the critical need for future collaboration between the churches and the secular communities in early childhood training, service delivery, and advocacy are included. (RH)

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for

PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS: EMERGING NEEDS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

A consultation organized by the Carnegie Corporation in collaboration with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund

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The Church's Commitment to Child Care

> "Child care concerns are not of a fleeting nature, but pose enduring issues which reach deep into the nation's life. At the heart of the debate lies the future well-being of America's children and families. ... Because of the magnitude of involvement of local churches in child care, the church has a deep, overriding responsibility to initiate, encourage and participate in a national dialogue on child care. ... In engaging in that national dialogue the church is consistently guided by its vision that child care services must be: available to all families on an equitable basis, draw resources from all sectors of the society, support the development of the child and the stability of the family, and be regulated in such a manner that encourages the development of a variety of program types of high quality in which health and safety are assured."
>
> Policy Statement on Child Day Care
> National Council of Churches, 1984

PS019165

The above statements are policy of the 32 member-communions (also called denominations) of the National Council of Churches (NCC), collectively representing 43 million people in this country. Similar policy is also held by other large national church bodies which do not belong to the NCC. Therefore, the commitment to quality child care in the church community is substantial.

The Place of Church-Based Child Care in the Field of Early Childhood Education

The landmark 1982 study of church-based child care, funded by the Carnegie Corporation and Ford Foundation and conducted by the Child Advocacy Office of the National Council of Churches, demonstrated that the church was the largest provider of child care in this country. The same is true today. We know that 83% of Catholic schools now have pre-school classes, almost 20% of all Presbyterian churches house child care programs, and that in 1980 3,000 Southern Baptist churches cared for young children during the week.

The church has a long history of caring for young children in a wide variety of programs from mother's day out to full day care. Recently, a new trend has begun to emerge with churches supporting family child care providers in their communities.

Child care providers working in church-based programs generally receive their early childhood training in state or private universities. The 1982 NCC study showed that 87% of directors, 91% of teachers, and 69% of teacher aides had education or formal training in early childhood education. In terms of their level of education, 87% of directors, 74% of teachers, and 19% of aides had bachelor's degrees. Graduate degrees were held by 25% of directors, 8% of teachers, and 1% of aides.

On-going staff training takes place at professional early childhood association meetings, denominational and ecumenical training events. A 1989 study by the Presbyterian Church (USA) showed that of those who attended professional meetings, 62% attended NAEYC's annual conference, 51% Regional AEYC affiliate conferences, and 14% the Southern Association for Children Under Six.

When child care directors in Presbyterian churches were asked what were the most serious problems they faced in providing child care (1989), low staff salaries, attracting staff, and retaining staff were among the top six mentioned.

The above data demonstrates that providers in church-based child care usually receive their original and ongoing training in the same institutions as providers in secular programs. It further shows that child care providers in church-based programs share the same staffing problems as programs housed in secular institutions. Nevertheless, church-based child care is shrouded in myth, sometimes left out of professional and public policy discussions, and often held at arms' length. This is probably due to discomfort with different belief systems, fears of evangelization, and caution over possible excessive entanglement of church and state on the part of secular colleagues. At the same time, the church has colluded in perpetuating this mythology by too often living and working within its own community rather than fully embracing those who live and work outside of the church.

One of the challenges of the next decade and the 21st century will be for church-based and secular early childhood colleagues to work more closely in pursuit of quality child care for all children who need it.

Early Childhood Curricula Published and Distributed by Churches

Numerous books have been published by individual denominations for staff with church-based early childhood programs. These are unlike traditional Sunday School curricula, because they contain relatively less religious doctrine.

When the NCC's 1982 study asked churches what their goals were in their church-based child care programs, the most frequently mentioned goal was the

"provision of love and warmth", followed by providing "child care for working parents", "sharing, cooperation", "positive self-image", and "independence, self-reliance". "Spiritual development" was mentioned by less that 16% of the respondents. In the 1989 Presbyterian study, 11% mentioned "Christian, religious program". The percentage would be higher in some centers, such as those housed in Southern Baptist Churches or Catholic schools. However, in all of the major denominations, sound child development theory is embraced, and therefore, the focus is on developing positive ethical values such as trust and respect, and well-rounded social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development.

The bulk of the curricula resources have been produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Southern Baptist Convention, United Methodist Church, Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Church, and Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod. For example, the Methodist publications include Beginnings: Ministry with Infants and Toddlers, Age 2, Weekday Programs for Children: Director's Manual, Weekday Programs for Children: Teacher's Guide, and Mothers' Day Out: Program Guide. These publications are distributed through denominational and ecumenical publishing houses.

Special Contribution of Churches to the Field of Early Childhood Education

Christians have a mandate to do justice and to provide nurture to persons, including children. In the fulfillment of that mandate, churches have an obligation to be particularly concerned with those who are poor, ill, handicapped, or in some way marginalized by the society. Individual churches fulfill that mandate to greater and lesser extents. There is always the potential to do more.

According to the 1982 NCC study, 57% of church-based programs offered scholarships, and 11.1% operated on a sliding scale basis. 23% participated in the Child Care Food Program, 15% in Title XX, and 8% in Title IV A. The more recent 1989 Presbyterian study showed similar results.

National church bodies are addressing the problems of AIDS, physical disabilities, mental illness, poverty, and a broad range of injustices in their educational programs, worship, and advocacy. There is, therefore, a base on which to build when a church-based child care program addresses any of these issues. Churches have at their disposal media networks, program staff, and vast constituencies. Most of all, they have moral authority and are able to use strong ethical language.

Established Training Networks within Denominations

Many of the denominations have their own educational organizations which hold periodic conferences, develop materials, and communicate with their memberships. Historically, these educational organizations dealt with school-age children, today there is also substantial attention given to children under six. For example, when as many as 18,000 attend the annual convention of the National Catholic Education Association, there is one talk per session devoted to early childhood education, or a total of 15 over the course of the four days. Similarly, the triennial meeting of the Episcopal Education Association holds up early childhood issues in keynotes, plenaries, and workshops. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has identified at least one key early childhood person in each of its 65 synods to be responsible for organizing synod-wide workshops for its providers in church-based early childhood programs. The publications of the NCC's Child Advocacy Office and Ecumenical Child Care Network are used widely. Congregations and Child Care, the NCC's new self-study process, is currently particularly popular.

In short, the denominations have both their education associations and local, regional, and national church structures at their disposal in developing training opportunities for their early childhood staff.

Finally, there is much discussion and substantial action within the theological seminaries related to preparing religious professionals in early childhood issues. Clearly, the seminaries are an important arena, since it is often here that future pastors learn about the importance of church-based child care programming.

Moving to the Future

Closer collaboration between the church and secular communities in early childhood training, service delivery, and advocacy is critical. Any mythology, discomfort, fear, or misunderstanding which separate the communities must be dealt with honestly and openly. Church-based and secular early childhood professionals will occassionally disagree, but many more possibilities for collaboration will open up. Both share the goal of providing quality care at affordable prices. Both share the goal of nurturing the values of love, trust, self-esteem, and respect. Both are committed to uprooting racism and the myriad of forms of discrimination which belittle us individually and undermine us as a society.